

APRIL 1969

WESTWAYS

IN TWO PARTS: PART ONE





ISLAND VOYAGE ABOARD THE "SWIFT"

By Irvin Ashkenazy

FROM La Jolla north to Point Conception, and from 11 to over 50 miles offshore, lie what are perhaps the most intriguing, but least known, places in California: the Channel Islands. Their combined acreage equals one-third that of Rhode Island; yet they are, for the most part, almost as mysterious today as they were over a century ago.

The most famous, Santa Catalina, is the only one to which there is free access and regularly scheduled public transportation. No travel brochure includes the other islands in its offerings, yet there are ways of reaching them.

One way is to enlist in the U.S. Coast Guard, Navy or Air Force and be given duty at the radar stations, communication centers, missile facilities, target ranges or the lighthouses maintained on five of the islands. Another way is to buy or hire an adequate vessel, obtain

landing permission from government authorities or private owners and spend a week or so visiting desolate San Clemente, far-off San Nicolas, ghost-haunted San Miguel, tiny Santa Barbara, rocky Anacapa and those two great ranches in the sea—lush and lovely Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa.

A third way is to get yourself invited, as I did, by the Los Padres Chapter of the Sierra Club for a weekend cruise to California's lonely island frontier.

The morning was still dim with left-over night when I reached the public dock at Santa Barbara. An oyster-gray overcast blocked out the sun and sealed in the chill. But I was prepared. Trip leader Nevis Fortney had warned: "Bring plenty of warm clothing. The wind gets very cold on the islands, even in May. We use the 'onion' system,

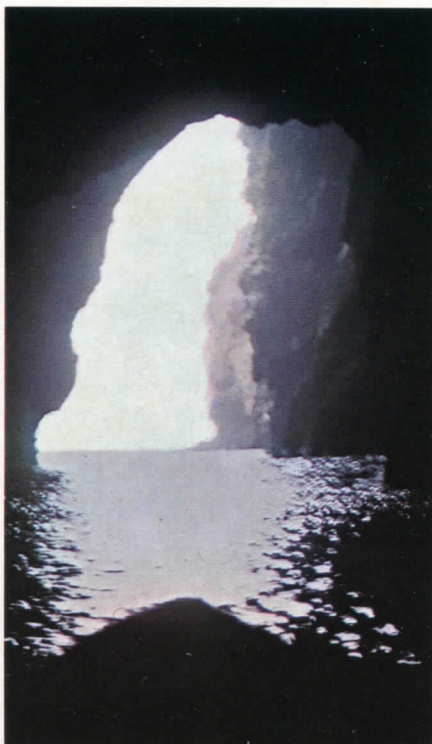
putting it on and taking it off in layers, according to changes in temperature. And—oh yes—we'll be landing in the surf from small boats, so wrap your sleeping bag in plastic to keep it dry. There are no docking facilities."

I was alone on the pier, studying the craft bobbing in the crowded harbor. Moored among them, hardly 50 yards off the end of the pier, lay a topsail schooner of singular grace. She was some 90 feet from bowsprit to taffrail, her lines and rigging a vision from a past century, the naked yards of her big square topsail braced against the sky. The carved figurehead, representing the head and shoulders of a long-haired woman, complemented the square, clipper stern painted "*Swift of Ipswich*—Santa Barbara." James Cagney's one-time private yacht, she now served as the Sierra Club's chartered galleon.

A crewman climbs aloft to set the square sail—and we're under way



Through the arch of Painted Cave, we emerge into brilliant sunlight



Profile Point juts out from the uneven coast of Santa Cruz Island





The captain and his crew set a merry tone with lively music and songs, while our clipper bucks the rolling waters off the Channel Islands

A pair of corpulent pigeons sauntered up to inspect the sleeping bag and battered canteens lying at my feet. ("Bring some large canteens," was added advice from Mrs. Fortney. "The only water available on Anacapa is from the ocean.") The pigeons waddled off, hastened by the approach of my fellow adventurers—ladies in slacks and sweaters accompanied by gentlemen lugging sleeping bags, cameras and other impedimenta.

By now the crew aboard the schooner was stirring. A drone rose from the ship's innards as her auxiliary engine came alive. The lines securing her to a couple of buoys were cast off, and she backed cautiously toward the pier, easing alongside.

Over a score of Sierra Club members, from athletic teen-agers to bright-eyed sexagenarians, stepped over the gunwale to the schooner's deck. They dumped their sleeping bags on the raised poop deck and distributed themselves along the rails and companionways or on the luggage and in other comfortable spots for the four-hour voyage. (Their enthusiasm testified to the spirit that has

made the Sierra Club one of the liveliest and most influential conservationist organizations in the nation.)

Nevis Fortney and her fellow trip leader, Janet Lawler, were scurrying about, checking the passengers, provisions and utensils, which were still being loaded aboard. The crowd of passengers through which they squeezed seemed rather more than the maximum 32 allowed on a two-day cruise.

"Are you sure there are only 32?" I asked Mrs. Fortney.

She glanced at me over her shoulder. "Thirty-three. I got special permission for you."

The *Swift of Ipswich* soon slid away from the pier. The three young crewmen who cast off the lines looked like college students on vacation—which they were. But they knew their jobs. The fourth crewman, Dick Headley, was one of the ship's owners. Captain Carl Gilberg, a large young man, bare headed and shirt sleeved, stood at the wheel, threading the schooner through the harbor, his shock of red hair and full red beard as colorful as the vessel itself. The throb of the diesel rose a few decibels as we

made open water, heading out across that vast, sea-filled mountain canyon known as the Santa Barbara Channel.

Our course was not due west, as might be imagined, but almost due south. The coast generally runs due north and south from Point Sur down to Point Arguello where it slants southeast a few miles to Point Conception. Here it cuts sharply east for 50 miles. Along this south-facing shore lies the city of Santa Barbara, a northern backdrop for the four major islands that mark an ocean corridor more than 25 miles wide.

The morning sky remained sullen as we plowed our way at a steady six and a half knots. One of the crew, Steve Elkins, pointed at the main crosstrees. There, high above, perched side by side, were two stout pigeons—the very pair, I'd swear, who'd accosted me on the pier.

"They're always bumming rides," Steve grinned.

The wind, though light, still had an edge, but the swells were easy, for which I was grateful. This calm belied the wilder convulsions to which these



We picnic at Frenchy's Cove and watch the waves break along the shore. The rugged cliffs of Anacapa Island give protection from the wind

waters are often subject. For the Santa Barbara Channel is no protected water body. The northwest trades rush unimpeded for thousands of miles across the Pacific, collide with the coast, pirouette around Point Conception and then whoop eastward down the Channel.

An hour out of Santa Barbara the wind swept the overcast from a cerulean sky and cut the sea in countless sparkling facets. The day was suddenly beautiful.

Dead ahead, beneath the horizon, lay Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa and San Miguel. South some 30 to 50 miles lay San Nicolas, Santa Barbara, San Clemente and Santa Catalina. The latter two were first sighted through the mists on October 7, 1542, by the "Columbus of the West," Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo. The great Portuguese navigator who, like Columbus 50 years before, sailed under the Spanish flag, was among the first Europeans to set foot on California soil. He named the two islands for his two ships, *La Vitoria* and *San Salvador*, and visited the others, naming them variously. The entire chain should, in all honor, be called the Cabrillo Is-

lands. But, by virtue of a commonplace irony, neither his nor any of the names he gave have survived the usurpations of later map makers.

Our first landfall was Painted Cave, near the western end of 62,000-acre Santa Cruz, the largest of the Channel Islands and the most intriguing. The island materialized slowly, like a print in developing solution. It resolved into a rugged barrier of massive cliffs stretching along the horizon for 21 miles. Behind the cliffs rose ridges and peaks scribbled with lines and patches of pine and oak, willow and eucalyptus.

On Santa Cruz, six miles at its widest, rocky peaks—some as high as 2,400 feet—enfold a lush interior valley, unique among all the islands. Here fly the large, blue Santa Cruz jays (found nowhere else on earth), great bald eagles and huge ravens—intelligent and ornery—once worshipped by the thousands of Canaliño Indians who lived on these islands and revered the ravens as messengers of their sun-god, Chinigchinich. Here also are found midget skunks and foxes as small as house cats.

Sebastián Vizcaíno visited Santa Cruz

in 1602, naming it the *Isla de Gente Barbudo*, the "Island of Bearded People," because one of his men claimed to have seen some bearded Indians ashore. Vizcaíno's chaplain and diarist, Padre Torquemada, described the friendly Canaliños as "a superior race," dressed in lustrous seal and otter skins.

The island received its present name in 1769 when Juan Pérez sheltered his ship in one of the island's many bays. While ashore, a friar serving with Pérez lost his small iron crucifix. The Indians found and returned it. So moved was Pérez by this unexpected honesty that he struck from his charts the island's former name and rechristened it *Santa Cruz*, "Holy Cross."

We dropped anchor some hundred yards offshore, and Nevis Fortney and Janet Lawler divided us into groups of five, the maximum allowed in each of the two boats lowered overside. I donned the required life jacket, stepped over the gunwale with the first group and clambered down the short Jacob's ladder, one foot feeling gingerly for the floorboards of the cockleshell heaving beneath me. Once safely seated, our

outboard motor snarled and we pulled away, heading for the cliffs.

Headley, our skipper, brought us around a craggy corner into a bight indenting the cliff. And there it was. The great black portal of Painted Cave yawned before us like Dante's vision of the gates of hell. Its Gothic arch rose from the sea, its jagged peak a hundred feet above the waters. As we moved into the dank shadow, the sea became a milky green, darkening swiftly as we entered. We moved slowly, our motor purring gently, but echoing as throaty thunder. Suddenly all about us rose a weird bedlam of reverberating barks and bellows, stunning our senses. Our flashlights spotted the glistening bodies of sea lions diving from ledges along the walls, swimming around and beneath us as they fled.

Silencing our motor, we slid deeper into the cave, flashlights probing the ceiling and lofty walls. The mineral-laden waters, dripping from above, had stained the interior with oxides of iron and copper in somber abstractions of green and gold and rusty red. The awesome chamber, larger than a football field, opened eventually at a second archway, smaller than the first, but filled with an even deeper darkness.

"Through there," Dick Headley said, "still more chambers open up."

But we left them to more ambitious spelunkers. Dick started the motor, and we headed back, emerging into brilliant sunlight and a circus of sea lions frolicking before the cavern's mouth.

Aboard the schooner, loafing away a pleasant hour while the others took turns visiting the cave, I tried in vain to make out one of the 1,500-foot peaks on Santa Rosa. The island lies directly west of Santa Cruz, across a strip of sea nearly 10 miles wide, the second largest of the Channel Islands. And, like Santa Cruz, it is a privately owned cattle ranch.

Shaped like a gigantic manta ray, 15 miles long and 10 miles wide, the island's lush valleys and rolling hills are treeless save for a stand of Torrey pines, a species found only on Santa Rosa and the rugged hills near La Jolla. Here herds of Herefords fatten, while dwarf Tule elk, Kaibab mule and Siberian deer, introduced decades ago, roam the ridges. On Santa Rosa only uninvited man is made unwelcome by the half dozen cowboys who run the ranch for the Vale and Vickers Company of Los Angeles. As was once the case on Santa Cruz, visitors were welcomed. But range fires set by careless campers, stock killed for meat by rustlers or for fun by vandals, long ago closed the islands to the public. The missile ranges of San

Miguel, San Clemente and San Nicolas maintained by the government are also quite unhealthy for unannounced visitors. The same may be said for the Air Force radar station at Johnsons Lee, near Santa Rosa's South Point, manned by over 200 men keeping a 24-hour sky watch.

It is estimated that over 20,000 Canalinos lived on the Channel Islands at the time of their greatest prosperity. Cabrillo's friar-scribe wrote that Santa Rosa was heavily populated by Indians living in six villages, Niquipos, Maxul, Xugua, Nitel, Macamo and Nimitopal. The island has yielded a wealth of archaeological treasures to scientific parties led by Phil C. Orr, curator of anthropology of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. And over the past 22 years, diggings on the Channel Islands have yielded more than 160 prehistoric village sites. One disclosed an ancient barbecue pit containing the charred bones of a dwarf mammoth. Radioactive carbon tests prove that the feast took place 29,650 years ago—one of the earliest indications of man in the western hemisphere.

Although Santa Rosa is a larger and more pleasant island, Cabrillo chose San Miguel as a refuge because, as he wrote, ". . . in this small one there is a good

(Continued on page 37)

PHOTOS BY NEVIS FORTNEY AND THE AUTHOR

The headlands of Santa Cruz. The largest of the islands, it is privately owned and permission to go ashore must be obtained from the owners



port and there are people."

The "good port" on the northern shore of San Miguel is Cuyler's Harbor. The island (called by the natives Liquimuyu) boasted two villages listed as Zaco and Nimollollo, and was peopled by Canaliños whose living derived from the sea. Cabrillo christened the island La Posesión and spent the winter there, daily serenaded by the voices of ravens and the nocturnal caterwauling of foxes. And by day and by night the winds screamed and the surf roared. He may have regretted his choice, but much too late. He broke his arm near the shoulder in a fall on the harbor rocks, blood poisoning set in and he died on the island on January 3, 1543.

His crew buried him there and, in his honor, renamed the island La Isla de Juan Rodríguez. As so often happens, however, a cartographer named Miguel Costansó later gave the island its present name, substituting his own first name for all previous titles. Cabrillo's grave itself has never been found.

Today the ghost of Cabrillo walks San Miguel along with the ghosts of thousands of Indians, those pleasant Canaliños of the Channel Islands who, for the next three centuries, were raped and robbed and murdered by otter hunters from a half dozen nations. The last Canaliño, a woman living alone for 18 years on San Nicolás Island, was found in 1853 and brought to the mainland where she died within a few short months. After being near extinction by hunters seeking their fur, the sea otter, thanks to government protection, are now coming back. So, too, are the great elephant seals, whose rookery on San Miguel's western tip is one of the very few left in the world today.

It was after 2 P.M. when the last boatload of sightseers returned from Painted Cave. Carl Gilberg ordered anchor weighed and sail made. A muscular wind tuned stays and halyards as the schooner heeled on the eastward leg of our weekend cruise along the northern coast of Santa Cruz. Mile after mile, in and out along bight and bay, majestic cliffs stood as ramparts against the sea—or against any other interloper. For Santa Cruz has always been a private kingdom.

French-born Justinian Caire was sent to the island over a century ago to manage cattle operations there for its British owners. He later bought them out in 1869. He and his Italian wife

made it their own, self-sustaining personal paradise, building a Mediterranean-type home in its beautiful interior valley, Arroyo Principal. They sent to their respective countries for all their employees: cooks and drovers and all manner of craftsmen and artisans. The fertile valley provided all their produce, and thousands of sheep and cattle, grazing the grassy mountain slopes, were an endless source of wealth. Caire planted choice European grapes and became one of the West's first great vintners, building a winery that annually produced 50,000 gallons of an exceptional vintage, which became famous throughout the state.

It was rare for anyone to leave the island. For, though Caire's rule was absolute, he was a benevolent patriarch, and his employees accepted their isolation. When couples who had grown up on the island were married, the celebration lasted for days. A new house was always provided and lifelong security was apparently assured.

During Caire's regime strangers could land there anytime and find a welcome at the ranch—whether or not the visitor could understand the language spoken there. Clifford McElrath, onetime foreman of the ranch, described it as "Santa Cruz Islandese," a mixture of Spanish and Italian, "with a little English for flavor." After Caire's death in 1898, a third language—gunfire—was heard more often as Caire's cowboys and sea-going rustlers exchanged shots among the coves and draws.

In 1937 the old patriarch's heirs offered the great island to the state as a park and recreation area—all 62,000 acres of it—for \$750,000, a relative pittance. Due to the Depression financial problems and bureaucratic delay, the offer was withdrawn and the people of California were deprived of one of the greatest bargains in contemporary history.

Four-fifths of Santa Cruz was purchased shortly thereafter by a Los Angeles businessman, Edwin Stanton. His heirs today continue to operate it as a cattle ranch. Except for a lonely 2,400-foot mountaintop controlled by the Navy as a communications center, the remainder of the island is owned by the Gherini family of San Francisco.

Our schooner moved at a steady clip, snug little coves coming into view then slipping astern, one by one. After more than two hours of sailing, Prisoners Harbor, one of nature's bigger bites into the coastline, appeared. Its most prominent features were a cattle-loading pier thrust far into the bay and some neat,

barnlike structures set among trees and lawns.

Prisoners Harbor got its name in 1830 when a group of 31 convicts were dumped there to repent their sins while clearing the land and supporting themselves as cattle ranchers. The mission padres had compassionately supplied them with food, tools and a few head of cattle with which to get started. But the prisoners soon decided to give up ranching. They slaughtered the bees and improvised rafts, lashing them together with strips of fresh rawhide, then set sail across Santa Barbara Channel. But sharks, attracted by the bloody rawhide, attacked the rafts, slashing the hides so that the logs fell apart. The survivors, clinging to scattered logs, were washed ashore at Carpenteria. The residents there decided that they'd been cleansed of their sins and allowed them to stay and become proper citizens once more.

Santa Cruz was now behind us. Before us lay six miles of sea and our destination, Frenchy's Cove, on West Anacapa.

The Anacapas, a curving chain of three narrow islets four and a half miles from east to west, guard the Channel's eastern gateway. The Canaliños named them Anyapah, meaning "Everchanging." Captain George Vancouver, who visited them in 1792, logged their name as Eneepah. His chart engraver misspelled it Enecapah. It was later Hispanized to Anacapa.

West Anacapa's massive headland materialized out of the haze, a rounded mesa of solid rock standing 930 feet above the sea. It resembled nothing so much as a giant circus tent. As we cruised past the illusion changed. The headland became a huge misshapen head of a deformed dragon. The body behind it sloped eastward for two miles to a narrow tail of broken boulders. West Anacapa terminates in a narrow cleft so high it can be filled only by the highest tides.

Middle Anacapa, a quarter mile wide and not so high, starts from this cleft and continues east a mile and a half to a rock-strewn strait. Across this looms East Anacapa, which is a mighty chunk of igneous rock topped by the white stucco homes and installations of a Coast Guard station. The station's gleaming white, 85-foot lighthouse tower looks down over 300 feet to the sea below. Its 600,000 candlepower light and bellowing foghorn have guided ships safely through the coastal channel since 1932.

We dropped anchor off Frenchy's Cove a little after 5 P.M. There was no

surf at all, for which we were grateful when our little boats hit the beach. We slipped over the side, wading briefly to get ashore. A rough path across the stony beach led us up a steep slope to a bluff cut along the side of a ridge. Here was a fire pit and a strip of concrete laid years ago by the National Park Service. A primitive but adequate comfort station stands like a sentry box at one end; a tall flagpole stands at the other. The two Park Rangers on duty the previous summer were not due back for another month.

Anacapa and Santa Barbara, the smallest of the Channel group, are the only islands under the supervision of the National Park Service. The two were set aside in 1938 as a Channel Islands National Monument to allow their flora, fauna and intertidal marine life to recover from past abuses. Nothing may be disturbed or removed—animal, vegetable or mineral.

Two recent bills were introduced in early 1967 by representatives Moss and Burton to establish a Channel Islands National Park. The measures were to include not only Anacapa and Santa Barbara, but Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa and—when the Navy makes it available—San Miguel as well. The bills died, however, when the Ninetieth Congress

terminated. In all events, they will be reintroduced during the new administration.

High above us, on the crest of the island's backbone, gulls exploded like flung confetti, displaced by some in our party seeking a more spectacular site for their bedrolls. But the climbers soon descended, drawn by the aroma of steaks being barbecued by Nevis and her volunteers. We roughed it that night in high style.

Hours later as the fire died and the wind rose, we crawled into our sleeping bags. I lay there, watching the lighthouse beacon thumb the stars, listened to the trades wailing from half a world away and thought of the stories told that night, of the paddle-wheeler, the *Winfield Scott*, loaded with returning miners and millions of dollars in sacked gold dust. She crashed on the rocks off Frenchy's Cove, directly below us, and was lost, gold and all.

I opened my eyes. It was morning.

After breakfast we stowed our rubbish, taking with us all that we couldn't burn, leaving only footprints.

Everyone is welcome to join these cruises aboard the *Swift*, whether one is a member of the Sierra Club or not. Individuals, couples, families and small groups come from all over California,

and even from neighboring states, to enjoy the many natural features the islands offer.

During 1969, one-day cruises will include a maximum of 36 passengers at \$11 per person; overnight weekend trips are limited to 32 passengers at \$28 per person; the toll for the three-day cruises is \$45 per person.

Overnight cruises include barbecued steak dinners and large campfire breakfasts (terrific!). But reservations must be made well in advance and *only* by mail. Reservations will be confirmed only upon receipt of fare. Address all inquiries to Mrs. E. A. Parkinson, 568 Beaumont Way, Goleta, Calif. 93017, enclosing a large, stamped, self-addressed envelope and 10 cents to help defray printing costs.

Schedules for all Los Padres Chapter Sierra Club outings are published three times a year (including hikes and other land outings as well as cruises). They are included in the chapter's monthly publication, *Condor Call*. A year's subscription is \$2.00.

If you are a loner type, you can hire or charter your own boat for a private cruise among the islands. At least four charter-boat operations are located at the Santa Barbara breakwater. And at last inquiry, a relatively new motor cruiser can be rented for \$75 a day; one not so new will hire out at \$50 a day. A \$50 deposit is required on each.

To go ashore on either Santa Cruz or Santa Rosa requires written permission. To land on the major, Stanton-owned section of Santa Cruz, write the Santa Cruz Island Co., Suite 1400, 615 S. Flower St., Los Angeles 90017. The fee for a 30-day permit is \$5; for a year, \$20. No fee is charged to land on the smaller, eastern section, but permission must be obtained from Mr. Pier Gherini, 230 La Arcada Bldg., Santa Barbara 93104.

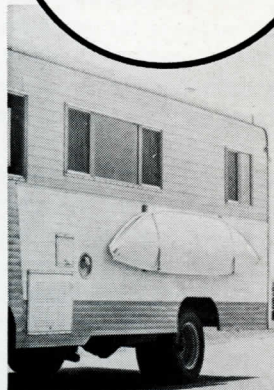
To land on Santa Rosa Island (which can be done only at Bechers Bay, and only by day), one must first obtain written permission from Vail and Vickers Co., 123 W. Padre St., Santa Barbara 93105. No fee is charged.

As for San Miguel, you'll have to be satisfied with an offshore look. But it will be worth it.

However you see the Channel Islands, onshore or off, these lonely sentinels will reward you for your pains. The craggy headlands and quiet coves, the flowers weaving rainbows among the rocks, the sea lion circuses and roaring rookeries of elephant seals—they're all out there just below the horizon, awaiting your pleasure, and your wonder.

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W-4